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ABSTRACT

To examine the existence of short term indicators of long term program results, studies and autobiographical/biographical material of gifted individuals were reviewed. Analysis yielded a checklist of 25 characteristics purported to lead to satisfaction as adults. The checklist items are explained to include the following self perceptions of gifted children: leadership; self determination and high perceived level of control over one's self; high levels of personal energy; increasing interest in the arts; early reading; interest in exploring problems and confidence in ability to do so; and ambition for excellence and advancement in the occupation. When the checklist was administered to three groups of students in grades 5 through 8 (including "new gifted," "continuing gifted," and control Ss), the continuing gifted Ss were significantly higher than control Ss in 11 areas, including ability to act as leader, intentions to complete at least 4 years of college, interest in the arts, and ability to plan school work. Results suggested program goals for home and school. Goals are presented for three areas: understanding, valuing, enhancing the individual's gifts; ability to deal effectively with the products of other minds; and creation and presentation by gifted students of products others will judge to be superior. (CL)

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SELF PERCEPTIONS OF GIFTED CHILDREN WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR ADULT PERSONAL SUCCESS AND GENERAL MENTAL HEALTH

Preliminary Report

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Self Perceptions of Gifted Children with Implications for Adult Personal Success and General Mental Health

Preliminary Report

Is there a cluster of common traits possessed by successful gifted adults, formed in the elementary school years? Can these traits be affected by education during those early years and then endure through later life relatively unchanged?

Contrary tc the assumptions made by some involved in school programs for the gifted, there is little evidence that a seven year old who has mastered algebra or the conjugation of irregular verbs is on his or her way to a satisfying successful adulthood. There is, however, some evidence that the enhancement or learning of certain characteristics and attitudes related to ambition, persistence, and a feeling of living up to potential can contribute to (1) a long-term feeling of satisfaction for the gifted adult and (2) his or her making valuable long-term contributions to our society. Gifted programs now proliferate in the United States, prodded by the concern for the full development of the individual and fear of international competition.

We must see to the refinement of such programs, and find ways to evaluate the expected effects of current gifted programs 30 to 50 years from now. Ease of short-term program evaluation (e.g. 80% of the 4th graders master a complex of skills in mathematics normally expected of 8th graders) is often a determiner of curriculum for these children. And so it should be if a child is ready and able to undertake the advanced curriculum. However, ease of

short-term evaluation may also cause us to offer less than these children need in the long run by blinding us to the importance of other or intensified offerings or educational goals.

What we need are short-term indicators of long-term program results. This is a preliminary report of a search for such indicators..

The basic premise of this work is that the lives of mature gifted adults are the best sources of information about the kinds of learnings which can result in today's gifted children reaching their potentials as adults able to look back on lives which they consider to have been both satisfactory and worthwhile.

To find this information we have looked extensively at three types of materials: (1) long-term studies of the gifted; (2) studies in which peers and colleagues of outstanding individuals were asked to evaluate the qualities which made those individuals outstanding; (3) biographical or autobiographical materials related to mature, effective gifted adults.

When an attitude, trait, characteristic or some other form of learning has been established by such research as a source of long-term satisfaction to many or most gifted adults in our society, we have considered it as a potential source of satisfaction for our gifted students. We have assumed that as more such learnings take place, there is a greater chance that the individual will later be able to view his/her life as having been well spent.

As each type of learning has been isolated, we have asked the following questions concerning it:

1. Can it be established or enhanced by education during the elementary school years?
2. Is there evidence of stability?
3. Can we state it as a clear goal for a gifted program?

4. Do we have evidence that specific teaching/learning strategies will meet the goal?
5. How can progress toward that goal be assessed?
6. Is this type of learning likely to be beneficial to our society as well as to the individual?

The answers to questions three and four above have yielded a set of guidelines to be used by parents and professionals in establishing or evaluating programs for gifted children.

Some answers to questions five form a preliminary checklist to evaluate progress toward program goals. Answers to the other questions provide the justification for the checklist and guidelines.

In an effort to provide workable classroom methods to achieve the types of learning which lead to life satisfaction for gifted adults, the checklist has been used with gifted children in the Phoenix Elementary #1 School District, Phoenix, Arizona to determine if the methods advocated in these guidelines are indeed causing such learnings to take place.

Space will not allow a thorough review of each of the 25 items on the checklist; however, a representative sample will be discussed.

The Checklist-Self Perceptions of Gifted Children

A Review of Research

1. Leadership is the single characteristic which society most demands of gifted adults. Bloom (64) gives evidence that opportunities to practice leadership skills may be severely limited by the establishment of a "pecking order" shortly after school entrance; this pecking order tends to remain unchanged unless the groups are broken up or radically restructured. Brandwein (55) sees leadership roles as needing to be thrust upon these students who

often did not seek them out themselves. He also found a need for "guidance, permissive in nature, not autocratic" if students were to learn the planning and skills which lead to leadership in the production and use of new knowledge.

2. Belief that one's social and occupational life must be limited by sex stereotypes can have detrimental effects for gifted girls, as evidenced by the work of Fox (77). A National Merit Scholarship study (Watley 69) shows inability to break out of male sex stereotypes to be a cause of failure for gifted boys. Sex stereotypes can be most successfully combated by reverse role modeling and playing during early elementary school years so they are never really established.

3. "Will be my own boss when I grow up": Self-determination and a high, perceived level of control over one's life are among the strongest determinants of life satisfaction shown in studies by Sears, P. (77) and Campbell (81). This is true for both gifted adults and for the population as a whole as are many of the affective outcomes advocated for gifted programs. However, as Sears, R. (77) points out "...gifted men have capacities that permit them a high degree of autonomy in the control of occupational activity, and hence their personal qualities are relevant." Society has a greater vested interest in gifted children's learning to control their own lives and some of the decision-making activities most effective with the gifted may be frightening or even detrimental for average children, making differentiated programming important. Taylor (63) cites as a factor in scientific creativity "marked independence of judgment, rejection of group pressures toward conformity in thinking."

4. High levels of personal energy are cited by Sears, P. (77) and other biographers of highly gifted adults as productive both of personal satisfaction and achievement. Many teachers, however, find high levels of energy on the

part of gifted students to be especially threatening and seek to discourage them, asserting that the children should be more controlled and "more grown up."

5. An increasing interest in the arts is a significant indication of bilateral brain hemispheric development. Many researchers including Ornstein (72), Guilford (77) and Torrance (67) have been concerned with this bilateral development as a major way of enhancing the effective I.Q. Many biographies and autobiographies of gifted adults, including that of Mead (72), refer repeatedly to rich and diversified cultural lives as providing major sources of satisfaction. There is significant evidence that a taste for cultural activities and the arts must be developed early if it is to be developed at all.

6. Early reading is probably the single most universally agreed upon common denominator of gifted children. The biographies of the highly productive gifted are filled with tales of prodigious feats of reading, often carried out secretly, as if under a compulsion. The ability to read and the desire to read do not automatically go together. The desire may even be discouraged.

Marie Curie's recollection of reading at age 4 was that she couldn't help it. It wasn't her fault; it was only because reading was so easy. Her mother dealt with the situation by taking away her books and sending her out to play. Many gifted individuals who have mentioned their reading abilities have also alluded to the pleasures of avid and voracious reading. It is a major source of life-long satisfaction for the gifted, but some classes teach reading while destroying the individual's desire to read.

7. Gifted children should believe they can find out about things themselves. Taylor (63) cites as a major factor in scientific creativity "a special interest in the kind of 'wagering' which involves pitting oneself against uncertain circumstances in which one's own effort can be the deciding

factor." Bloom (64) mentions "encouragement of active interaction with problems, exploration of the environment, and the learning of new skills" as one of only three environmental factors causing differences in general intelligence. Sears, R. (77) says of the Terman men: "So the objective facts of life - the high level preparation, the success and status and financial rewards received - appear to have had negligible importance in determining final satisfaction with the occupation side of life. Rather, it looks as if there were some continuing affective quality - an optimism about life, an enjoyment of occupational combat, and a feeling of self-worth - that characterized the more satisfied of these men at age 30 and persisted through the next three decades of their lives." (p. 123)

8. If they believe they are going to do worthwhile things with their lives they are more likely to do so and to achieve personal satisfaction. Sears, P. (77) found "ambition for excellence and advancement in the ... occupation" to be an indicator of life satisfaction for gifted women, and ambition was found to be predictive for gifted men (Sears, R.,77). Biographies of successful individuals of great power from Maria Montessori to Noel Coward are replete with incidents illustrating this ambition for excellence beginning in childhood. It is one of a developmental complex of ego traits including self confidence and lack of feelings of inferiority which Bloom (64) shows as about 70% developed by age 13 and remaining highly stable thereafter.

Survey Administration*

The survey was administered during the week of September 27, 1982 to three groups of students, grades 5, 6, 7, and 8, in Phoenix Elementary District #1.

The first group, labeled "Continuing Gifted", was made up of students who

*A copy of the survey and its results are included in the appendix.

had been enrolled in District #1's gifted program for a semester or longer. These students qualified for the program by scoring in the top 3% on the California Achievement Test or above 125 on an individual I.Q. test.

Students in the "New Gifted" group were notified one to two weeks before their entrance into the gifted program and filled out the survey on the morning of their first gifted classes.

The control group was matched to the other two by grade, ethnic background and approximate economic status, no student being qualified for the gifted program.

Approximately 78% of the students in Phoenix Elementary #1 are members of an ethnic minority. Because local norms are used to qualify members of different minorities for the gifted program, the ethnic makeup of this program conforms to that of the District as a whole, as did that of the sample. All schools in the District qualify for Title 1 funding. More than half the students in the gifted program qualify for free lunches.

Results of the Survey

Throughout the survey, the results for the "New Gifted" group should be seen as possibly tainted by expectations and self concepts changed by the immediacy of their identification and program entry. The survey will be repeated when newly identified gifted students are unaware of the identification to make results for this group more valid.

The results for items 2, 7, 11, 14 and 15 were expected to be reversed from those for the other items (responses for the "Continuing Gifted" group lower than for the control group). For each of these items except 7 they are significantly lower, .50 or more with a dramatic difference greater than 1.0 on 14 which would seem to be at least partially due to a program goal of having

children learn to view individual differences as resources rather than handicaps.

The "Continuing Gifted" group also showed themselves to be much less concerned with sexual stereotypes, less likely to quit right away when something was not understood and more interested in many things than the control group.

For the positively phrased questions, the "Continuing Gifted" group shows itself significantly higher (.5 or better) than the control group in the following areas:

a. Ability to act as a leader.

b. Intending to complete at least four years of college.

c. Being "own boss" when grown (1.36).

d. Trying again after failure.

e. Learning to do most things themselves.

f. Liking to figure out the "why" of things.

g. Being more interested in the arts.

h. Ability to find out about things by themselves.

i. Wanting to find out what people can do.

j. Ability to plan school work.

k. Planning to do worthwhile things with their lives.

Three items show strong differences between "Continuing Gifted" and the control group but less than .5:

a. Liking to read a lot (.49).

b. Becoming adults able to do the things they think are important (.39)

c. Liking to look at more than one side of a question (.32)

Item 23 shows a difference of .33 in the opposite direction to that expected. Gifted adults who are successful seem to display well developed

powers of concentration, but these gifted children either do not see themselves that way or do not think they should. Selin & Birch (1980) show gifted children as having difficulty concentrating on difficult and routine tasks which tend to slow them down.

There is agreement among all groups on the following:

a. Feeling good most of the time.

b. Learning more things they are interested in.

c. Being able to make good choices for their futures.

d. Enjoying words and using them carefully.

e. Trying to make their work look as good as possible.

For some of these items, results as high as those for the control group must be considered a positive result.

a. Being gifted is no guarantee of feeling good, as demonstrated by recent statistics on dropouts, suicides and drug and alcohol abuse for this group as compared to "average kids". All groups in this study agreed that they felt good most of the time.

b. A major cause of "dropping out" is lack of interest, not the case with this gifted group.

c. Being able to exercise control over one's life may be the single greatest indicator of life satisfaction for all group of adults in the United States (Campbell, 81). All of these groups see themselves as able to do this.

d. All groups recognize the importance of making their work look good. Since many gifted youngsters seem to believe that it is enough if they understand something without doing the necessary work to demonstrate their understanding , this can be considered a positive result.

The result for 24, "Enjoy words and using them carefully", cannot be

considered a positive result for the continuing gifted group. Taylor & Barron (63) found "a drive toward comprehensiveness and elegance in explanation" to be an indicator of scientific creativity and it is of importance in many other areas as well. Perhaps this result is due to the large percentage of these students for whom English is a second language.

Guidelines and Program Goals for Home and School

This study and its results indicate that program goals can be set up which will contribute to the development of bright adults who will find their lives to be worthwhile.

I. Goals related to understanding, valuing, enhancing the individual's gifts.

A. Groups of students will be rearranged and in-and-out migration from groups established, changing the "pecking order" to give students opportunities to practice leadership skills and to learn to value one another as resources.

B. Students will avoid having their educational or occupational choices limited by sexual stereotypes.

C. Students will establish feelings of self-confidence.

D. Students will seek at least a B.A. educational level.

E. Students will pursue a program leading to a possible career.

F. Students will demonstrate diminished feelings of inferiority.

G. Students will learn that lack of success can be conducive to growth and to keep going.

H. Students will observe and practice high levels of personal energy.

I. Students will learn, value and practice the basic elements of a high level of physical and emotional health.

J. Students will become increasingly autonomous, self-sufficient and independent.

K. Students will develop (through play) a liking for thinking in the abstract.

L. Students will be helped to understand and to "test for fit" divergent models of the intellect and of learning.

II. Goals related to the gifted students' being able to deal effectively with the products of other minds.

A. Students will be able to understand, value and practice a variety of forms of creative expression.

B. Students will show increased persistence in the pursuit of information.

C. Students will seek an increasing richness of cultural life.

D. Students will become increasingly avid and voracious readers.

E. Students will have early and successful research experiences with non-authoritarian guidance, learning to learn by themselves.

F. Students will learn to tolerate ambiguity and seek divergence in thought.

G. Students will develop an early and broad interest in intellectual activities.

H. Students will practice using standard and accepted forms of information storage and retrieval.

I. Students will be motivated, guided and supported in exploring areas of human knowledge new to them.

J. Students will have opportunities and support to further develop their competence in familiar and appealing areas.

K. Students will learn to deal in a comfortable and matter-of-fact manner with the technology of learning.

III. Goals related to the creation and presentation by gifted students of products others will judge to be superior.

A. Students will master the techniques necessary for doing their own planning and the disciplines for following those plans to completion.

B. Students will learn to make their own viable choices.

C. Students will demonstrate ambitions for excellence and advancement.

D. Students will strive to present their work so that it will receive the recognition of others.

E. Students will learn to become absorbed in learning to the greater exclusion of distracting elements.

F. Students will be better able to persist despite failure.

G. Students will learn to choose comprehensiveness and elegance of expression.

H. Students will display an increased willingness to take intellectual risks.

Directions

This is a checklist to find out how you feel about yourself and your future. There are no right answers and no wrong ones.

Please read the statements below and draw a circle around the word or words in the column to the right that is closest to how well the statement fits you right now. Circle only one response for each statement.

RIGHT NOW I THINK THAT I:	AGREE STRONGLY	AGREE	DISAGREE	DISAGREE STRONGLY
1. Can act as a leader in many ways	AS	A	D	DS
2. Will have to do only work expected of someone of my sex	AS	A	D	DS
3. Will complete at least four years of college	AS	A	D	DS
4. Will become an adult able to do the things I think are important	AS	A	D	DS
5. Will be my own boss when I grow up	AS	A	D	DS
6. Would usually try again when I failed at something.	AS	A	D	DS
7. Have less energy than most kids my age	AS	A	D	DS
8. Feel good most of the time	AS	A	D	DS
9. Am learning to do most things myself	AS	A	D	DS
10. Like to figure out the "why" of things	AS	A	D	DS
11. Would usually quit right away when I don't understand something	AS	A	D	DS
12. Am more interested in music, plays, and/or art than I used to be.	AS	A	D	DS
13. Like to read a lot	AS	A	D	DS
14. Can't do some things because of my race	AS	A	D	DS
15. Am not interested in very many things	AS	A	D	DS
16. Can find out about things by myself	AS	A	D	DS
17. Like to look at more than one side of a question or problem	AS	A	D	DS
18. Want to find out what people can do	AS	A	D	DS
19. Am learning more things in which I am interested	AS	A	D	DS
20. Can do a good job of planning my own school work	AS	A	D	DS
21. Can make good choices for my future	AS	A	D	DS
22. Am going to do worthwhile things with my life	AS	A	D	DS
23. Get so involved in learning I sometimes forget other things	AS	A	D	DS
24. Enjoy words and using them carefully	AS	A	D	DS
25. Try to make my work look as good as possible	AS	A	D	DS

Name_____

Grade_____

Birth date_____

ITEM	Cont. Gifted 5-6-7-8	New Gifted 5-6-7-8	Control 5-6-7-8
1	3.98	3.94	3.47
2	1.81	2.30	2.44
3	4.34	4.30	3.61
4	4.56	4.64	4.17
5	4.68	3.70	3.32
6	4.58	4.70	4.08
7	2.20	2.19	2.43
8	4.04	4.19	3.96
9	4.11	3.94	3.49
10	4.11	4.21	3.60
11	1.62	1.64	2.32
12	4.06	3.88	3.47
13	4.20	4.18	3.71
14	1.46	1.70	2.47
15	1.90	1.64	2.63
16	4.63	3.85	3.70
17	3.77	4.12	3.45
18	3.98	4.15	3.48
19	4.35	4.36	4.07
20	4.20	3.85	3.40
21	4.28	4.32	4.22
22	4.44	4.42	3.77
23	3.18	3.30	3.51
24	3.93	4.12	3.75
25	4.25	4.53	4.33

AVERAGE RESULTS

Survey 9/27/82

AS = 5

A = 4

D = 2

DS = 1

INTERVALS

4.5 - 5 = Strong Agreement

3.5 - 4.5 = Agreement

2.5 - 3.5 - No Indication

1.5 - 2.5 = Disagreement

1 - 1.5 = Strong Disagreement

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